

Southern NM Youth ACTION Coalition Overview

❖ Mission Statement

Engaging southern New Mexico communities—especially youth—with fun and educational outdoor experiences to promote healthy lifestyles and stewardship of our natural world.

❖ Background

The Lincoln National Forest is a champion in a growing coalition eager to make a difference in the lives of future generations. A mounting body of research finds that when children's connections with the natural world are broken, they suffer physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially and spiritually. Described as "nature deficit disorder," by author Richard Louv, this set of symptoms results from children spending less time outdoors than ever before.

While the research paints a gloomy picture of the physical and emotional impacts nature deficit has on today's increasingly sedentary and digitally focused society, the same studies offer much needed hope. Studies from around the globe illustrate that when we increase interactions with nature, we live healthier and more fulfilling lives. Specifically, the studies demonstrate that children who spend time outdoors:

- Perform better academically.
- Play more creatively and have more active imaginations.
- Have lower stress levels.
- Become fitter and leaner.
- Experience fewer symptoms of ADD/ADHD.
- Develop stronger immune systems.
- Have greater respect for themselves, others, and the environment.

There are organizations and individuals throughout our communities striving to reverse the troubling trends and reconnect children with the natural world. The hope embedded in these grassroots efforts is that by investing in our communities' connections with nature, we will receive long-term dividends in the form of greater protection of our natural areas and healthier residents to enjoy them.

Why do we need to work together? The vision is that together we have better opportunities to share information and network, leverage existing resources, seek out new funding opportunities, and build greater awareness and action in our communities. We need partners from all walks of life—education, government, business, non-profits, and passionate individuals—if we are to be successful in engaging our children in the arenas of their daily lives. How we react to the epidemic of our youth's nature deficit disorder will be our legacy, reflecting to future generations the reverence we held for nature and healthy living.

To do its part, the Lincoln National Forest is leading a coalition of over two dozen partners that seeks to reverse the troubling trends associated with nature deficit disorder. We are planning and implementing a Children's Forest concept and pursuing resources through the Forest Service's More Kids in the Woods program. Both are aimed at uniting partners and the special places around southern New Mexico under a common vision, so that we can continue making a difference in the lives of our youth.

“Leave No New Mexico Child Inside” HEALTH FACT SHEET

CHILDHOOD OBESITY

- ❖ Studies reported upon in the medical journal, *Pediatrics*, reports a link between “screen time” (watching television, playing video games, and using computers) and childhood obesity both nationally and locally. (Sharif & Sargent, 2006)
- ❖ Children who watched more than the recommended two hours of television per day were 2.6 times more likely to be overweight than children who watched less than two hours. (Davison, 2005)
- ❖ Overweight and obesity are associated with increased rates of diabetes, heart disease, asthma, arthritis, some cancers and poor health status. (US CHHS, 2001) Chronic diseases such as these are responsible for six out of every ten deaths in New Mexico.
- ❖ The economic burden of chronic diseases related to overweight and obesity is devastating to the New Mexico economy. New Mexico spends an estimated \$324 million annually on direct adult medical expenditures (preventative, diagnostic, and treatment services) that can be attributed to obesity. (Finkelstein et al., 2004)
- ❖ Obesity is on the rise in New Mexico with 27 percent of high school students being overweight or at risk of overweight. (NM YRRS, 2005) This does not bode well for these students considering that they are 80 percent more likely to be obese as adults. (CDC, 2009)

DIABETES

- ❖ The new lack of childhood activity and its extra pounds can lead to adult-onset diabetes and can actually shorten average lifespan from three to five years. (NMDOH & UNM, 2006)
- ❖ Diabetes incidence increased an estimated 37 percent in New Mexico from 1990 to 2000.
- ❖ Diabetes puts a huge strain on the New Mexico economy. The annual cost to New Mexico for diabetes care is \$1.2 billion. (ADA, 2003)
- ❖ People who engage in regular physical activity and healthy eating practices decrease their risk for chronic diseases and generally live healthier and longer lives. 1 of every 7 cases of diabetes could be prevented through exercise and diet, saving New Mexico \$140 million annually. (ADA, 2003)

ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER

- ❖ Studies reported upon in the medical journal, *Pediatrics*, linked early television viewing in children with attention deficit disorders (ADD). (Christakis, 2004)
- ❖ Contact with the natural world can significantly reduce symptoms of attention deficit disorder in children as young as five years old. (Kuo and Taylor, 2004)

Fun Websites

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| • discovertheforest.org | • childrenandnature.org |
| • naturerocks.org | • letsmove.gov/outside |
| • naturalinquirer.org | • nwf.org/getoutside |